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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/04/2017

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: ITALIAN AMBASSADOR URGES URGENT US
OUTREACH TO EU MEMBERS

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman for Reasons: Section 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Italian Ambassador to Lebanon Gabriele Checchia, accompanied by Second Secretary Carlo Jacobucci, met with the Ambassador September 5 to provide a readout of EU High Representative Javier Solana's September 6 visit to Beirut (Italy was acting on behalf of the EU presidency in the absence of a Portuguese embassy in Lebanon). Checchia reported that, despite Solana's public posturing in support of a compromise between March 14 and the opposition, Solana seemed to be leaning toward the March 14 majority's position on the upcoming presidential elections, especially regarding the right to elect the president using a simple majority in the last ten days if all else fails. Italy, Checchia said, was in the same position: outwardly favoring a compromise solution, given Italy's significant role (largest troop contributor) in UNIFIL, while inwardly supporting March 14.

¶2. (C) Checchia noting that this weekend EU foreign ministers will hold their last informal meeting (Gymnich) before Lebanon's presidential election season kicks off on September 25, said Lebanon will be a key topic. He urged the US to reach out to Portuguese FM Amado and Italian FM D'Alema (both of whom have visited Syria in recent months, we note) to make sure they are on the same page; otherwise, he warned, "some" EU members (we assume he was referring to Spain, as FM Moratinos' penchant for closer relations with Syria is well-known) might push the EU to compromise too much, resulting in a position that fails to provide necessary support for Lebanese government.

¶3. (C) Comment: If Checchia is correct that Lebanon will feature prominently in this weekend's Gymnich meeting, we hope that USG Washington, Lisbon, and Rome interlocutors can reach out to their Italian and Portuguese counterparts in advance. We hope that we can help deflect any move toward some kind of compromise with Syria over Lebanon's presidency: Lebanon's members of parliament should be encouraged to attend the presidential election session (rather than use the threat of withholding quorum to thwart elections). In addition, any public statement from the EU foreign ministers regarding Lebanon's presidential elections will be high-profile, influential news here. We suggest that we encourage the EU statement to emphasize support for Lebanese presidential elections to be held on time and in accordance with Lebanon's established constitution, free of outside manipulation or interference.

FELTMAN